

## Of mechanisms and myths

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## Of Mechanisms and Myths: Conceptualising States' "Soft Power" Strategies through Sports Mega-Events

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### ABSTRACT

Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power" has become an increasingly used term to help explain why states—including so-called "emerging states"—are paying greater attention to acquiring various forms of cultural and political attraction. However, within mainstream International Relations, Political Science, and Sport Studies literature, a continuous debate remains as to what actually constitutes soft power, how national leaders go about acquiring it, and how forms of attraction convert into power outcomes in both the short- and long-term. This analysis endeavours to overcome these issues by offering an "ideal type" model that details states' soft power strategies, the mechanisms they use, and the tangible future outcomes they gain.

Recent years have seen an increase in the use of Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power"<sup>1</sup> by scholars and commentators attempting to explain why states—including so-called "emerging states"—are seeking to acquire various forms of cultural and political attraction. However, within mainstream scholarship in International Relations, Political Science, and Sport Studies literature, a continuous debate remains as to what actually constitutes soft power, how national leaders go about acquiring it, and how forms of attraction convert into power outcomes in both the short- and long-term. This analysis moves beyond a discussion of Nye's concept of "soft power" towards an "ideal type" of a state's soft power strategy that can be used in future empirical research—sporting, diplomatic, and otherwise. One of the problems with Nye's work—and much of the academic discourse it has inspired—is that debates remain lofty, concepts slippery, and theories opaque, rendering their use in actual research difficult. In previous work we have critiqued the term but came to the conclusion that "Joseph Nye clearly put his finger on something when coining the concept of 'soft power'—there has evidently been a shift in attempts to manipulate the 'politics of attraction' in international affairs amongst states of all political hues."<sup>2</sup> The originality of this exegesis lies in its attempt to build out from

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our empirical studies of sport diplomacy to construct a heuristic device: an “ideal type” that can be used by researchers to analyse further case studies to understand the components of states’ soft power strategies.

As part of the strategic shift from employing “hard” to “soft” power, states have increasingly used sport in general and sports mega-events [SMEs] in particular. The latter often finds use as broad-brush diplomatic tools to increase a state’s international prestige, improve an often-tarnished image, and increase the likelihood of the bidding state’s acceptance on the world stage. The majority of regime types see SMEs as part of their wider diplomatic armoury and, by their very nature, these events cut across all of the areas identified by us and are considered important for generating soft power. It is significant: current debates tend to focus on semantics or fail to engage with the concept, rather than provide a conceptual framework with which to attempt to understand a state’s soft power strategy. As such, we refrain from confronting many of Nye’s conceptual limitations whilst providing the rationale for our research methods and sources used in developing the analysis. In introducing an ideal type, flesh is added to the theoretical bones of much of this debate by highlighting the mechanisms national governments and relevant stakeholders draw on to acquire soft power. To illustrate its potential, two real-life test cases are provided: Germany’s hosting the 2006 Fédération Internationale de Football Association [FIFA] World Cup and Qatar’s sport diplomacy, including the acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.<sup>3</sup> The possible pitfalls of any soft power strategy are also highlighted before concluding how this ideal type might be used in future research to help further identify and explain the mechanisms through which a state can acquire soft power for diplomatic purposes.

Nye, an American political scientist, coined the concept of “soft power” in the 1990s. For Nye, the “power” side of the concept denotes one’s ability to “effect the outcomes you want, and, if necessary, to change the behaviour of others to make this happen.”<sup>4</sup> For twenty-first century leaders, Nye suggests that political outcomes are achievable through an amalgamation of both “hard” and “soft” power strategies.<sup>5</sup> On one hand, states may draw upon forms of “hard power” through, for example, capitalising on military force or offering economic rewards. On the other, they may choose to adapt indirectly the political agenda in such a way that shapes the preferences of others by, for instance, emulating one’s “intangible assets”: attractive culture, innovative ideologies, and/or credible and commendable institutions, values, and policies.<sup>6</sup> It is the latter approach that Nye calls “soft power”: “the ability to achieve goals through attraction rather than coercion.”<sup>7</sup> Such attraction converts into power outcomes when those on the receiving end of a soft power strategy look to the state producing it for affirmation, guidance, and leadership, or seek to imitate their domestic and/or international achievements.<sup>8</sup>

This is, however, not to suggest that soft power should replace the utilisation of hard power; in fact, national leaders should, whenever possible, endeavour to combine the soft dimension of attraction with the hard dimensions of coercion and inducement—what Nye terms “smart power.”<sup>9</sup> Rather, Nye advocates that nation-states should take greater advantage of the former.<sup>10</sup> Nye’s rationale for this is three-fold. First, since the end of the Cold War, nation-states have become far more concerned with forms of welfare over military glory, whereby in the modern era national leaders need greater public support before engaging in forceful pursuits.<sup>11</sup> Second, for the majority of states, the use of force severely jeopardises their economic objectives and ability to maintain international competitiveness.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the increasing influence of the information revolution and globalisation has led to states’ behaviour coming under closer scrutiny than ever before. The result is that the use of force has become less tolerated in post-industrial—and, in particular, advanced capitalist—societies, leading to the increasing importance of soft forms of power.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of the concept is demonstrated most evidently through the increasing number of academics, politicians and governmental authorities, private institutions and agencies, and journalists and blog writers that have attempted to apply, adapt, and/or measure soft power in their discussions of state-led policies. A good example from the latter group is Susie Measure of *The Independent*, who classifies the global obsession with K-pop music as a significant cog in South Korean’s soft power offensive, one that has seen the state successfully overtake rivals like Japan as Asia’s “coolest child.”<sup>14</sup> Takashi Umekawa from *Reuters* identifies the Japanese Foreign Ministry plan to inject \$15 million into the funding of Japanese studies and research at overseas universities as a clear push for enhanced “soft power,” one greatly helping to promote “Japan Brand” internationally.<sup>15</sup> Finally, Roula Khalaf of the *Financial Times* grounds Britain’s decision to commit a new fund towards the protection of historic property after the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham’s “cultural war” and subsequent destruction of ancient sites in Syria as a significant soft power coup—a decision praised by numerous Syrians determined to safeguard their “identity and existence.”<sup>16</sup>

A second group consists of politicians and governmental authorities who have referred to soft power in speeches and various state policies. Prominent examples include the former American secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, referring to both soft power and smart power at the 2013 Council for Foreign Relations in Washington, DC.<sup>17</sup> The same holds true for British Prime Minister David Cameron’s description of Britain’s place in the world as a “soft power super power” in a speech on the importance of Scotland to Britain at the Olympic Park in East London in 2014.<sup>18</sup> Then there is the Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Communist Party address in Beijing in 2014 where he singled out the importance of raising China’s soft power reach as

well as the need to communicate better the country's message to the world.<sup>19</sup> With regard to governments and soft power, a good example is the workshop dedicated to the use of smart power at the United States Department of State's Third Annual Conference on Program Evaluation in 2010.<sup>20</sup> Another is the British Parliament's 2013 establishment of its "Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence," which led to the publication of two extensive volumes in March 2014.<sup>21</sup> Also in Britain, the British Academy's 2014 "The Art of Attraction, Soft Power and the UK's Role in the World" looks to pinpoint and document the country's most fundamental soft power resources.<sup>22</sup> The centrality of soft power in the Australian government's "Public Diplomacy Strategy 2014–16" lays out the state's plans to increase significantly "trade, investment and economic prosperity promotion."<sup>23</sup>

The third group consists of a number of private institutions and agencies that are concerned with measuring a state's soft power reach. These include the British-based Monocle Media Group, which in collaboration with the British Institute for Government publish their annual "Soft Power Survey," ranking the top thirty countries based on their culture, cuisine, sport, governance and diplomacy.<sup>24</sup> The Portland Communication's yearly "Soft Power 30" attempts to measure the soft power properties and subsequent public opinion of states, positioning the top thirty countries based on their diplomatic networks, cultural impact, governmental ideologies, level of education, digital infrastructure, and economic capacity.<sup>25</sup> Ernst and Young Global Limited's year on year "Rapid-Growth Markets Soft Power Index" looks to measure the leading twenty countries based on their global integrity, global integration, and global image.<sup>26</sup> Lastly, although not referring directly to soft power, Anholt-GfK's "Nation Brand Index" grades the top fifty nations on public opinion acquired from 20,000 citizens in twenty countries on how they perceive a state's people, products, culture, government, education, lifestyle, and tourism.<sup>27</sup>

The fourth and most dominant group consists of academics who have applied Nye's concept in their attempt to theorise various state-led pursuits. In commenting on the field of international relations, for example, Jan Melissen advocates that, "it is now a cliché to state that soft power is increasingly important in the global information age."<sup>28</sup> Such an observation finds support by those scholars who have argued that China is currently engaged in a soft power offensive through the promotion of its Confucius Institutes abroad, its involvement in United Nations peacekeeping missions and various humanitarian efforts, as well as the rise and international reach of its media outlets: Central China Television (CCTV) and Xinhua News Agency.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, many have claimed that India's rising international reputation for excellence in film, business, and technology equates to a drive for soft power.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Brazil appears engaged in a soft power strategy through its leading role in successfully negotiating multiple international

agreements related to public health, as well as its position as the world's largest aid donor.<sup>31</sup> Arguments exist that Turkey exerts significant soft power across the Arab world due its recent democratisation efforts across the region, its economic success, rising credibility, and shared heritage.<sup>32</sup> Finally, according to Nye, Moscow is said to have “failed to capitalize on the soft-power boost afforded to Russia by hosting the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi,”<sup>33</sup> although this is a “reductionist” account of the use of this SME as a signal of Russia's growing power.<sup>34</sup>

As with most mainstream concepts, the time lag is fairly long before soft power begins to appear in sports studies literature and analyses. “Social capital” took some six years from Putnam's successful 2000 book, *Bowling Alone*, to enter sport studies;<sup>35</sup> “soft power” has taken even longer. Within the sports studies literature, it took some 20 years for the concept to gain traction. The growing scholarship has focused towards identifying sport's diplomatic and/or soft power functions for national leaders and nation-states more generally.<sup>36</sup> Murray, for example, looks at the pros and cons of using sport for diplomatic goals<sup>37</sup>; and Jackson pinpoints how the use of sport, although regularly used as a diplomatic tool, has in fact historically fostered many instances of conflict.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, use of the concept has been most prevalent by those scholars who attempt to explain the global lure of hosting both first-order—FIFA World Cup; Summer Olympic Games—and second-order—Rugby World Cup; Commonwealth Games—SMEs. The most notable work here emerges through other examples: Germany hosting the 2006 FIFA World Cup;<sup>39</sup> Beijing staging of the 2008 Olympic Games;<sup>40</sup> the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa;<sup>41</sup> the 2011 Rugby World Cup in New Zealand;<sup>42</sup> the London 2012 Olympics;<sup>43</sup> Brazil's “double hosting” of the 2014 FIFA World Cup and 2016 Olympic Games;<sup>44</sup> Sochi's delivery of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games;<sup>45</sup> and Qatar's acquisition of the 2022 FIFA World Cup.<sup>46</sup> In most cases, the thinking is that hosting a successful SME leads to enhanced soft power that can make a state's culture and political values more attractive to others, thus improving the image or “brand” of the host and/or signalling their emerging status as a key international actor.<sup>47</sup> In short, sport is no longer just a niche cultural institution for national governments to consider employing domestically, but rather a highly relevant foreign policy tool.<sup>48</sup>

One could be forgiven for presuming that with the quantity of commentators making use of Nye's concept—across the four groups outlined—an excellent heuristic device with which to help explain how and why states engage in the “politics of attraction” on the international stage would have been developed. Unfortunately, although the concept has shed some light on why states undertake a soft power strategy—for international prestige/increased trade, and more—little analysis emerges on the “how.” Indeed, despite its growing significance, many have strongly criticised Nye's work.<sup>49</sup> Through their



attempts to unpick, understand, and extend soft power theoretically, Nye's original concept has been and, more importantly, continues to be, questioned on four specific levels. First, many have raised concerns over what soft power actually is and, more specifically, whether it is merely another buzzword for conceptualising that of nation branding and/or place marketing.<sup>50</sup> Second, many have suggested that Nye fails to deliver a clear description of how one actually acquires "soft power" or forms of attraction, leading to a highly confusing and problematic concept with which to work.<sup>51</sup> Third, due to Nye's reliance on discussions of the West, many equate soft power as being either too structural or Western-centric.<sup>52</sup> Finally, some have argued for greater academic attention in identifying and highlighting the potential pitfalls for any state that attempts to acquire soft power forms.<sup>53</sup>

In responding to the first criticism, Nye—along with others—has been quick to point out that soft power should not merely be considered another term for place marketing/nation branding.<sup>54</sup> As Nye has been at pains to advocate, soft power is not simply the ability to persuade; it is the ability to entice and attract, leading to acquiescence and imitation. Accordingly, if a state's culture, values, and/or policies are not themselves authentically attractive, no soft power outcomes will be gained;<sup>55</sup> soft power cannot be achieved through slick marketing and/or branding, but emanates from, above all else, credibility—a value that simple propaganda and/or public relations campaigns often lack.<sup>56</sup> Agreeing with Nye, we argue that although selling a positive image of oneself is a significant part of public diplomacy, for soft power to work, leaders need first-and-foremost to build long-term relationships based on trust and credibility, eventually leading to an enabling environment for effective government policies. Given this process, we concur with Nye that soft power aligns itself more to public diplomacy than nation building and/or place marketing.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, successful soft power requires regular and equal communication with foreign audiences, "listening as well as [simply] talking."<sup>58</sup>

Unfortunately, Nye fails to offer much in the way of a solution to the remaining three criticisms levelled at him. This analysis redresses this lacuna in part by: setting out tangible areas in which states acquire soft power; offering empirical examples of real-life cases to show what soft power acquisition looks like in practice; and using a non-Western case study to illustrate that soft power transcends geographical localities. To this end, therefore, the focus is on presenting an "ideal type" that goes some way to identifying how states actually go about acquiring soft power forms, the mechanisms involved, and how these convert into long-term outcomes. It occurs by drawing on the empirical examples of one Western state—Germany hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup—and one non-Western state—Qatar's sport diplomacy—to identify the universal applicability of soft power.



The ideal type put forward is derived from empirical work conducted over a four-year period by us with national authorities in Europe, South America, and the Middle East.<sup>59</sup> In addition, we have generated knowledge as part of a multi-state research project on the leveraging strategies adopted by countries hosting mega-events in an attempt to produce tangible “legacies,” including, amongst others, highlighting their nation, improving their national image, and putting themselves on the international map.<sup>60</sup> The following is indicative of the range of sources drawn upon that fed into the development of the ideal type. Both studies of Germany and Qatar have appeared in full elsewhere.<sup>61</sup>

The data collection strategy occurred in two stages. The first included the continued collection and analysis of documents between 2011 and 2015 in connection to the foreign policy and soft power objectives of German and Qatari authorities. In selecting documents, only those published directly by state authorities or state-subsidaries—for example, national tourist boards, national governing bodies, sporting committees, and so on—were included in the final sample. Thus, to ensure that the content of each document resembled the objectives of the state, we excluded all documents not directly derived from German and Qatari authorities. In adhering to this inclusion-exclusion criterion, the final document sample resembled that depicted in [Table 1](#). The document analysis guided the construction of interview schedules and interviews with state officials.<sup>62</sup>

The second stage of our data collection strategy included semi-structured interviews with key officials in Germany and Qatar between 2011 and 2015. The ability of semi-structured interviews to produce the most in-depth accounts of specific phenomena, as well as combine the flexibility of unstructured techniques with more focused, structured-like forms, led to the decision to use this form of interviewing.<sup>63</sup> Choosing key organisations and personnel occurred in line with the study’s aims and objectives—see [Table 2](#)<sup>64</sup>—and all participants were required to be over the age of 18 years old.

**Table 1.** Document inclusion-exclusion criterion.

Country	Included Document Sources
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– German Federal Government Reports;</li> <li>– German Federal Ministry of Interior Reports;</li> <li>– German Tourist Board;</li> <li>– Germany “Land of Ideas” campaign;</li> <li>– 2006 World Cup Organising Committee.</li> </ul>
Qatar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Qatar General Secretariat for Development Planning;</li> <li>– 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy;</li> <li>– Aspire Academy for Sports Excellence;</li> <li>– Qatar Supreme Council for Health;</li> <li>– International Centre for Sports Security.</li> </ul>

**Table 2.** Interview inclusion criterion.

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Participant must work for state-run/funded organization;
Participant must work in relevant department (foreign policy, tourism, sports policy/development, public relations, etc.) within state organization;
Participant must hold a certain level of expertise within organization (Director, Manager, Senior Official, Committee Member, officer/analyst, etc.);
Participant must be over 18 years of age.

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As shown in [Table 3](#), the final interview sample included for Germany: the German Foreign Office; the “Germany: Land of Ideas” campaign, the state core place-branding initiative set-up by to showcase Germany’s culture, politics, and business; the German Football Federation; and the FIFA 2006 Organising Committee responsible for successfully delivering and maintaining the legacy of the 2006 FIFA World Cup. For Qatar, there were several bodies. The 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy, the organization responsible for Qatar’s 2022 FIFA World Cup legacy; the International Centre for Sports Security who seek to showcase Qatar’s international commitment to integrity, security, and safety through sport; the Aspire Academy of Sports Excellence the state’s national athletic training centre; the National Health Strategy, responsible for achieving Qatar’s desire to occupy a world-leading healthcare system; and Qatar University’s Gulf Studies Program responsible for promoting international collaborative education and research.

Data were subjected to a thorough thematic analysis: first, reading and re-reading of documents and transcribed interviews; second, generating “initial codes” that identified parts of the data found most significant; third, identifying the various relationships that existed between these initial codes to begin creating overarching themes; and fourth, re-working the themes until each was distinctive in its own right. Following this stage, we then re-consulted the literature and concluded the analysis by assigning names to our themes that captured the overall “story” each was telling.<sup>65</sup>

**Table 3.** Interviewee positions and organizations.

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Country	Interviewee(s)
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Two Foreign Policy &amp; Communications officers from the German Foreign Office;</li> <li>– The Chief Executive of “Germany: Land of Ideas”;</li> <li>– The Secretary General of the German Football Federation and the Vice President of the FIFA 2006 Organising Committee.</li> </ul>
Qatar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Supreme Committee member and one Public Relations and Communications Director from the Qatar 2022 Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy;</li> <li>– Public Relations Manager of the International Centre for Sports Security;</li> <li>– Public Relations Director and the Head of Sport Development at the Aspire Academy of Sports Excellence;</li> <li>– The Director of the Qatar National Health Strategy;</li> <li>– The Director of Research of Qatar University’s Gulf Studies Program.</li> </ul>

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A central part of the contribution is the development of an ideal type of soft power that will be of use to both academics and practitioners alike. An ideal type is, of course, a construct that represents an intellectual description of a phenomenon in its abstract form and does not provide us with explanations. Thus, an “ideal” standard is not “in the sense of being perfect, but rather ‘ideal’ in the sense of being an intellectual construct that may never exist in the real world.”<sup>66</sup> An ideal type is, therefore, a conceptualisation with which the researcher can compare reality on the ground—empirical evidence. Ideal types are thus hypothetical constructs formed by emphasising aspects of behaviour and institutions that are—generally—empirically observable. These constructs isolate “those variables central to the study of a problem, putting aside those aspects of the reality which seem inessential to the analysis.”<sup>67</sup> This ideal type has been developed through an iterative process between concepts and empirical data across a number of cases, as stated above, including non-Western states—Brazil, Qatar, and Russia—and Western ones—Britain, Germany, and Canada. Two key points need emphasis. First, the purpose of an ideal type is to be parsimonious; by definition, it will mean that a number of aspects are not included in our model. Second, our purpose is not to advance a “theory” of soft power or an explanatory framework for predicting outcomes, but rather to produce a tool that researchers can use and adapt by looking at a variety of states and their soft power strategies.

The ideal types of soft power and the domains within which they are likely found are revealed from the two “test cases”<sup>68</sup>—one actual SME, the FIFA 2006 World Cup, and one longer-term sports diplomatic strategy by Qatar—drawn from sport for two simple reasons. First, sport is an under-researched yet fruitful area for soft power/diplomacy research; both Political Science and International Relations as disciplines are bereft of in-depth studies using sport and sporting events as part of a nation’s soft power strategy.<sup>69</sup> Some slow progress has occurred since Taylor suggested in 1986 that International Relations and sport suffer from a case of “mutual neglect.”<sup>70</sup> Sports studies literature more broadly has begun to engage with the political and diplomatic use of sport. SMEs, in particular, are significant soft power opportunities, acting as major contributions in the process of improving their nation’s image, profiling and highlighting themselves globally and “attracting” others.<sup>71</sup> International sporting success, whether by athletic competition or by the effective staging of SMEs, is said to provide the perfect opportunity for states that seek to “attract” others with their values and culture and persuade them to want what they want by projecting specific images, principles, achievements, and visions to foreign publics.<sup>72</sup>

The second key reason why sporting test cases were chosen is that sport and sports events play a role in all five of the—interlinked—“resources” that

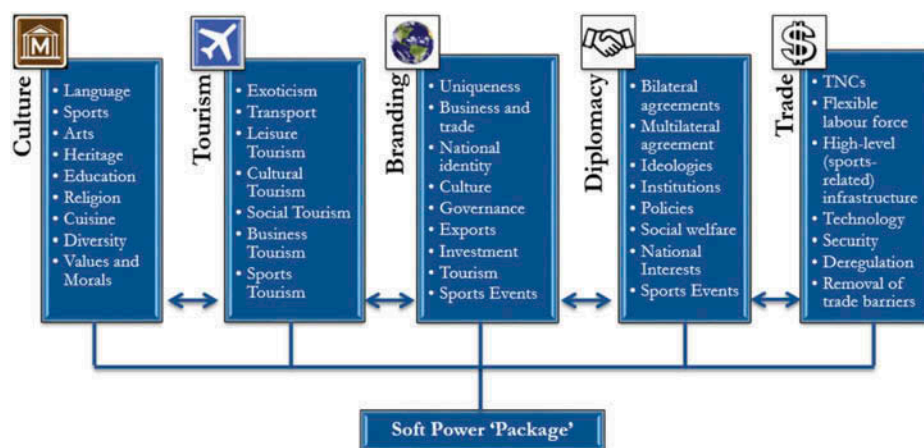


Figure 1. Soft Power “Resources”.

appear essential in a state’s successful soft power strategy—see Figure 1. The first resource is “Culture”—to which “SMEs” clearly belong. Often leveraged to improve global standing, a state’s culture is often central to making a state more attractive to others, one of the reasons Germany and China invest heavily in language institutes abroad; art, heritage, history, and literature fall under this category, too. The BBC World Service acts as a cultural conduit exemplifying the global reach of English as a language and the British values of democracy and fair news reporting.<sup>73</sup>

The second resource, “Tourism,” has close links with both “Branding” and “Diplomacy,” the third and fourth resources respectively. It serves the purpose of attracting foreigners to a state, bringing with them business for the tourist industry; equally, satisfied tourists can act as multipliers passing on positive messages about the host country on their return home, something reported to have happened in Germany’s case through hosting the 2006 World Cup.<sup>74</sup> “Branding,” the third resource, takes aspects such as “tourism” and “culture” and attempts to package them to “sell” a country externally. van Ham suggests that such state branding is an attempt to gain prestige on the world stage.<sup>75</sup>

Diplomacy is a broad resource that entails formal state-to-state relations, but also encompasses the multitude of actors now involved in diplomatic relations. Public diplomacy studies differentiate between the “old” *modus operandi* via “hierarchical state-centric structures” and the “new” model of a “network environment” in which several actors, of which the state is but one, undertake public diplomacy.<sup>76</sup> The role of non-state actors in the burgeoning area of a “sports” diplomacy—both the use of sport to achieve diplomatic ends, but also the more prominent role of the International Olympic Committee and other international non-governmental organisations—is greatly increasing. Whereas a few well-known examples of sport being used as an “ice-breaker” in diplomatic affairs are regularly cited—for instance, the

early 1970s “Ping-Pong” diplomacy between the United States and Communist China—a wide range of regime types are now signing up to host SMEs to signal their arrival on the world stage. Recent examples include the “BRICS” states—Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa—Qatar, and Azerbaijan.

Finally, the “Trade” resource is straightforward: states use all of the resources discussed above to increase their global trade and grow their economies; it can entail finding new markets within which to sell both products that they manufacture or their own “goods” such as financial services. SMEs often find use in sending out a “signal” that a state has the requisite infrastructure and logistical expertise to do business at the highest and most efficient level; the construction of sporting sites themselves often lead to extensive flows of human capital between states.

Taken together, the five domains constitute the areas within which states attempt to gain soft power. Clearly, some of the components of the ideal type above are relatively constant, for example, “art,” “language,” “national identity,” and “values and morals.” Key events such as an SME can stimulate other components. An SME can kick-start tourism, have an impact on diplomatic relations, and affect trade. Any success in these areas then becomes part of the nation’s “branding.” Australia, for example, understands and brands itself as a “sporting nation,” despite the fact that Australians suffer high levels of obesity. The Australian Tourist Commission suggested that the Sydney Olympics in 2000 “accelerated development of brand Australia by 10 years.”<sup>77</sup> Of interest here is that “sport”—including SMEs—cross-cuts all of the domains outlined. “Sport” is part of a nation’s cultural make-up. The majority of mainstream sports today began in England in the late nineteenth century; sports spread across the world in great part through the British Empire and now stand as a cultural, universal language—for example, association football-soccer shares the same rules throughout the world. SMEs are major tourist attractions—although “regular” tourists remaining at home often offset net tourist gains. Nonetheless, sports events often “force” fans to visit places they would otherwise not; they can lead to repeat visits and the “multiplier” effect—returning home and telling others of the good time spent in the host country. Nations and cities often find themselves branded through sporting events—see Qatar below. Canada has become “addicted” to hosting SMEs, for example, in an attempt to show case itself globally.<sup>78</sup> Finally, SMEs often find use as arenas to show diplomatic solidarity—but also disunity—between states.

Germany’s hosting of the 2006 World Cup offers an excellent example of how a state can actively seek to make itself both more attractive and more influential on the world stage. The following is necessarily brief and focuses on just some short examples from the “resources” highlighted in the ideal

type above. A desk officer at the German Foreign Office set out their position in relation to cultural foreign policy. “We spend almost a quarter of the whole budget for foreign policy on culture which is more than 700 million Euros . . . this is the long-term promotion of ‘soft power’ . . . we want to bring people together . . . and sport is one part of this [promotion of Germany’s culture].”<sup>79</sup>

Germany wasted no time in implementing its “World Cup Hosting Strategy” with the express purpose of improving its poor image abroad,<sup>80</sup> believing that overcoming negative stereotypes would lead to an increase in in-coming tourism and position Germany as an economic and scientific country with which to trade. The government also wanted Germany perceived as a nation of culture—“*Kulturnation*”—and its people known for more than just being “punctual, reliable and disciplined.”<sup>81</sup>

The German strategy resulted in a long-term, carefully planned, co-ordinated, and implemented set of actions designed to change the national “image” amongst foreign publics. The “strategies” in Figure 2 take place in the resources identified in the soft power ideal type: the cultural augmentation strategy greatly increased the international scope of Germany’s World Cup through showing projects in 40 different countries and 87 different international cities.<sup>82</sup> According to Green,<sup>83</sup> such “augmentation”—that is, putting on activities, entertainment, and services over and beyond the event itself—enhances and broadens the appeal of an event. In preparation to receive tourists, a number of specifically designed campaigns were to prepare Germany and the Germans to be hospitable to the crowds of foreign visitors expected for the competition.<sup>84</sup> One of the latter was the “Nation-wide

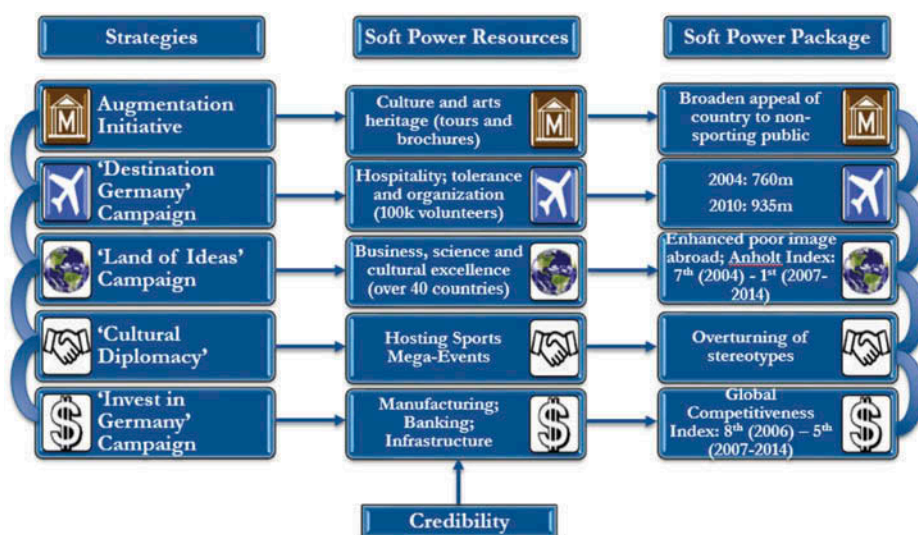


Figure 2. Germany's Soft Power "Package" (2006).



Service and Hospitality Campaign” that held some 430 meetings with 6,500 service employees—bus, tram and taxi drivers, service personnel at airports, train stations, information offices, and the like—to prepare them for foreign visitors.<sup>85</sup> The tourism industry seems to have benefitted from the four-week tournament, as a poll conducted during the tournament revealed that 90 percent of visitors would recommend Germany as a holiday destination.<sup>86</sup> The “Branding” resource, headed by the “Land of Ideas” campaign and launched in 2006, was to improve the German national image by displaying Germany and attracting tourism and foreign investment. It was so successful that it continues to this day, bringing together key actors from business, science, and culture, and facilitating the promotion of Germany’s image externally.<sup>87</sup>

The diplomatic resources put into the 2006 World Cup extends to efforts to win the event—rumours of high-level bribery came to light in the 2015 FIFA scandal—and secure its success. The German Foreign Office pursued an overall “cultural diplomacy” strategy within which sport diplomacy took centre stage. It worked closely with the Organising Committee and organised a whistle-stop “welcome tour” for Franz Beckenbauer, the Committee’s chair, to all 31 countries that qualified for the tournament. According to the vice chair of the Committee, Horst R. Schmidt, “we received a high-level reception [in all 31 countries]; he went to the countries to welcome them to Germany... this greatly influenced the media coverage of the event positively.”<sup>88</sup>

On trade, the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce in their report indicated

the most important economic stimulus was due to a greater willingness among Germans and foreign football fans to spend money. Almost 50% of all businesses who reported a positive effect from the [World Cup] also reported increased sales in this context.<sup>89</sup>

Economically, the 2006 event appears to have paid off—an estimate that the two million foreign tourists who travelled to Germany during the month-long tournament spent €600 million.<sup>90</sup> Whilst it is notoriously difficult to find accurate data on the exact economic impact of the World Cup on a nation’s economy, one-half of the companies that reported a positive World Cup effect on their business thought the gain in Germany’s reputation and its products was “the underlying reason for the economic success of this mega event.”<sup>91</sup> This “reputational gain,” whilst hard to calculate precisely, is clearly part of a successful soft power strategy.

It is clear that the above “resources” identified overlap: an augmentation plan involving arts, heritage, and history designed to attract tourists—“Tourism” resource—and get them to stay longer and spend more money—“Trade.” It also greatly adds to the “Branding” resource—Germany’s cultural history as the



“land of poets and thinkers” helps sell it as a tourist destination. Equally, part of the reason Germany’s soft power strategy worked well was because of wealth: hardly any “infrastructure” spending—building roads, transport systems, stadia—occurred, as these were already present and at a very high standard. Thus, resources found re-direction into the type of campaigns discussed here.

Applying the ideal type to the case of Qatar reveals its soft power strategy via sport diplomacy. Due to its abundance of wealth, predominantly from the sale of crude oil and liquefied natural gas, Qatar is able to invest heavily in the acquisition of soft power through sports diplomacy. Qatar’s nominal GDP per capita is almost double that of Germany’s—US\$93,965 compared to roughly US\$47,589<sup>92</sup>—and, relative to many states, a substantial proportion of this wealth has seen investment in various sporting endeavours.<sup>93</sup> Based on our various engagements with Qatari authorities and relevant documents, Qatar’s soft power objectives through sport rest upon the mechanisms of culture, tourism, branding, diplomacy, and trade—see Figure 3. Important, however, is that as Qatar’s engagements with global sport are recent, the actual soft power outcomes have yet to materialise fully and, therefore, this analysis offers only the intended outcomes that Qatari authorities seek to achieve.

One of the Qatari authority’s central objectives through sport is to debunk various negative cultural stereotypes, most particularly the “orientalist” connotations of Arabs as static, undeveloped, and lazy.<sup>94</sup> In this sense, authorities see the hosting of SMEs that attract international audiences—such as the 2019 International Association of Athletics Federations

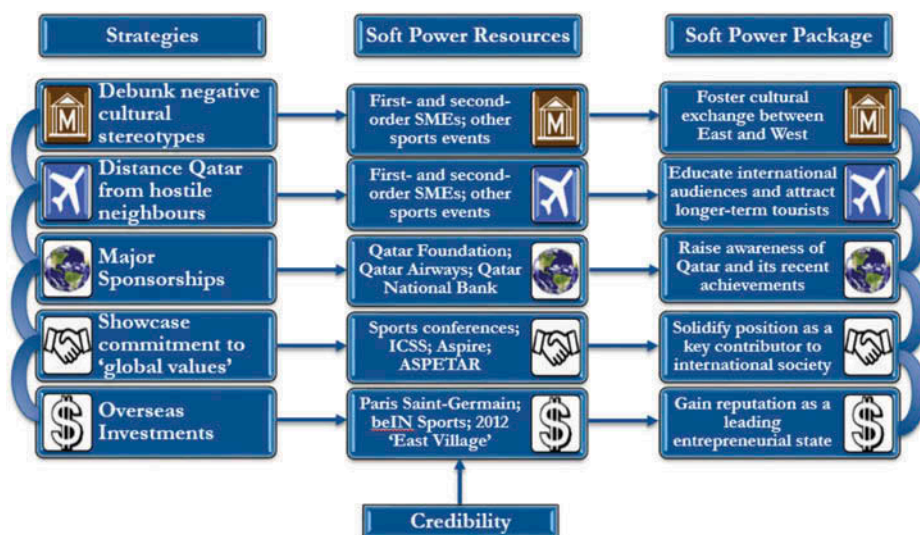


Figure 3. Qatar’s Soft Power Sports Package.

World Championships and the 2022 FIFA World Cup—as the most suitable vehicles through which to “create better understandings between the East and the West.”<sup>95</sup> More specifically, Qatari authorities seek to “signal” the ability of Arabs and Qataris to handle the logistical complexities of hosting major sports events. In addition, such events offer an ideal international showcase to Qatari capacity for creating and implementing innovative and state-of-the-art technologies: the state’s achievements in designing carbon-neutral, environmentally friendly cooling technology for the 2022 World Cup is a case in point.<sup>96</sup>

Enhancing inward tourism remains closely linked to debunking stereotypes, as in the German case study. At present, those travelling to the state predominantly for various short-term conferences and business seminars mostly comprise Qatar’s tourist trends.<sup>97</sup> According to Qatari authorities, one reason the state fails to attract longer-term holiday-makers is due to the continuous inaccurate media portrayal of the Middle East as a homogenous region plagued by conflict and civil strife. Thus, hosting SMEs is one way to “educate international audiences of the differences between us [Qatar] and many of our regional [Middle Eastern] neighbours”<sup>98</sup>. The intention is also to show that the state is a safe and peaceful tourist destination. The hoped-for outcome here is the desire to attract longer-term holidaymakers who will provide the state with a much-needed revenue stream once its crude oil reserves diminish.<sup>99</sup>

The “Branding” resource sets out to raise awareness of Qatar—its location, history, culture, and achievements. Two examples stand out: the first is the Qatar Foundation’s original €170 million deal with FC Barcelona in 2010 to become that football club’s shirt sponsor, the first commercial sponsorship of the FC Barcelona shirt; and second is the 2013 agreement with FC Barcelona for Qatar Airways to replace the Qatar Foundation’s original agreement. Sponsorship of one of the globe’s largest sporting brands looks to raise international awareness of what Qatar has achieved in a short space of time. The Qatar Foundation’s “Education City” plays host to the largest enclave of American universities outside the United States and has thus converted Doha, the capital, into one of the leading educational hubs across the Middle East.<sup>100</sup> Qatar Airways has also established itself as one of the fastest growing airlines in the world.<sup>101</sup>

The diplomatic resource includes the regular accommodating of sports conferences and athletic talent. The Doha Goals Forum, for example, annually invites hundreds of sports academics and athletes to Doha to discuss and debate the role of sport for economic and social progress. The Aspire Academy of Sport Excellence’s Football Dreams Initiative acts as an elite development programme, wherein “annually over 600,000 boys from across the world ... undergo preliminary trials, with the best candidates being invited back to Doha for expert training”<sup>102</sup>; and the Academy’s sports

medicine hospital, “ASPETAR,” welcomes a plethora of elite athletes each year to provide specialist expertise and treatment. In all such cases, the Qatari authorities look to transform the country, and Doha, into a key international centre for dialogue, research, and training.<sup>103</sup>

With regard to trade, Qatar has invested heavily abroad in a number of different areas, including multiple international sporting acquisitions. Most well known is the Qatar Sports Investments’ acquisition of Paris Saint-Germain football club in 2012. In the same year, Qatar Sports Investments also purchased the French *Ligue 1* television rights; broadcasting under the name “beIN Sports”; the network now holds the rights to transmit live sport in “Hong Kong, the US, Canada, Australia and Indonesia.”<sup>104</sup> Finally, Qatari Diar, the real-estate wing of the Qatar Investment Authority, purchased a large part of the London 2012 Olympic Village, now known as “East Village.” Purchasing the land in 2011 and with other major stakeholders like Delancey, Qatari Diar is transforming the complex into luxury housing.<sup>105</sup> Apart from the obvious long-term financial investment the state wishes to recoup, such projects also look to demonstrate Qatar’s acumen in the areas of business, finance and real estate.

Taken together, Qatar draws strongly on all five areas identified in the ideal type with the express purpose of improving its standing on the international stage. As is well documented, the hosting of a sports event as part of this strategy can also backfire: by inviting the amount of media attention that a global sporting event attracts, a state is challenging insatiable 24-hour media to scrutinise its *modus operandi*. In Germany’s case, the global media witnessed a well-run, *carnavalesque* festival of sport enjoyed by a variety of cultures with very few problems; Qatar, however, has had an avalanche of poor media coverage around its dealings with foreign construction workers and the extraordinary employer-employee relations that exist.<sup>106</sup>

Clearly further research needs to develop the ideal type of soft power put forward in this analysis. However, attempting to fill partially a major gap in the literature offers a start to the debate on grounding soft power in empirical research. The latter drew from a test case of Germany’s hosting of the 2006 FIFA World Cup and Qatar’s sport diplomacy strategy. There has not been adequate space to develop the linkages between the “resources” highlighted in the ideal type: Culture, Tourism, Branding, Diplomacy, and Trade. Yet, it is clear that these areas overlap, and several institutions—for example, the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office—seek to promote all in the work that they and their sponsored organisations do. The significance of the analysis lies in the attempt to spell out soft power resources, which then allow researchers and policy-makers to consider the potential gains and drawbacks of strategies designed to win over opinion abroad and make states more attractive to others. Such an ideal type is useful as a starting point in

understanding how and why states seek to influence others using sport diplomacy and SMEs. It is clear that not all states seek a soft power strategy as put forward in this discussion. Some, like Russia, for example, confound the standard rationale and do not fit the ideal type. Rather than rendering the ideal type problematic, researchers can understand better such “outliers” by the way in which they differ from the mainstream.<sup>107</sup> Debates on and around the empirical aspects of “soft power” are to be encouraged, and it is hoped that this analysis has been able to persuade scholars of the value of studying sport diplomacy and SMEs to shed light on their role in a “politics of attraction.”

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## Notes on contributors

**Jonathan Grix** is one of very few political scientists who have turned their attention to sport. His recent work highlights the political nature of sport; moreover, he shows how the study of sport—worthwhile in its own right—can lead to understanding wider machinations in the political system ranging from governance of the public sector with sport in international relations and national identity formation. His key area of focus is on government involvement in sport and the use of sport by governments.

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